

JAPAN CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY NEWS

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EQUALITY UNDER LAW FOR RELIGIOUS BODIES

Should shrine Shinto be allowed to have a status of special privilege as compared to that of other religious bodies in Japan? Is Shintoism in Japan a religion that stands above other religions because of its traditional ties with the imperial family and with the Japanese national heritage?

According to the April 27 issue of Christian Press, those who would answer "Yes" to these questions have been handed a decisive set-back.

Religious leaders have recommended to the Ministry of Education that no special privileges be granted to such shrines as Ise in respect to the Religious Juridical Persons Law. The decision came after eighteen meetings of the "religious deliberations council", a consultative body called to advise the Education Ministry as to how the law regulating religious bodies should be interpreted.

Dr. Zenta Watanabe, noted Christian leader, took an active part in these hearings (which were held not in connection with the Diet, as erroneously reported in an earlier issue of the ACTIVITY NEWS, but at the behest of the Education ministry). Dr. Watanabe represented not the National Christian Council, but the Christian Church Federation (Kirisutokyō Rengo Kai). This Federation embraces both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, and is concerned solely with the legal involvement of churches with the Japanese government.

Dr. Watanabe has reported that some Shinto leaders hoped that the Grand Shrine of Ise in particular might be exempted from registration under the religions law. The argument was that Ise has a special connection with the Emperor, who is the "symbol of the State". For this reason, Ise represents something that belongs to all the people of Japan. In other words, Shinto, for the Japanese, is a kind of super-religion. Dr. Watanabe replied that various groups differ widely in what they mean by the concept of "religion". It was at length decided that no special consideration for the Ise Shrine could be granted within the context of the religions law. In this way the principle of equality for all religions under law was vindicated.

The National Christian Council, however, has asked a special committee to take note of public opinion throughout the country in regard to the shrine issue, and to keep an eye on any further developments in this area.

CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS

By the time this issue of ACTIVITY NEWS is off the press, the general election of 1958 will be a matter of history. During recent weeks 953 candidates have been contending for 467 seats in the Lower House of the Diet. With most of the aspirants affiliated either with the Liberal-Democrat majority or with the Socialist Party, it was the first general election ever held in this country under a two-party system.

Candidates and their helpers cruised the towns and dusty country roads in cars, jeeps, and trucks decorated with banners and slogans. They held innumerable rallies in schoolrooms, in community halls, and in the open air. Although there was apathy and a certain lack of seriousness among large sections of the voting public, many thousands listened with careful attention, sensing their responsibility to make the democratic process a reality in this land. Certainly the candidates--nineteen of whom were women--worked tirelessly. It is significant that 21 of the 953 persons seeking office are active Christians. All but one of these are Protestant church members.

8 of the 21 Christian candidates belonged to the Liberal-Democrat Party. (This is the conservative faction, committed to a gradually expanding defense force, and to close ties with the United States and the rest of the free world. This majority party finds wide support in the business community, in rural areas, and among older people generally across the country.)

The other 14 Christians ran for office on the Socialist ticket. (The Socialists, also a somewhat unstable coalition, generally favor disarmament, cessation of nuclear testing, more welfare legislation, closer ties with communist China, and a somewhat "neutralist" foreign policy. The trade union movement in general, university students, and many younger voters look to the Socialists for political leadership.)

Christians seeking election to the Diet included one former prime minister (Tetsu Katayama, veteran Socialist), six men who have held the rank of cabinet minister, and one ex-speaker of the House. In the last general election three years ago 18 out of 26 Christian candidates were elected to the Diet.

This year, one candidate was a United Church of Christ pastor. The others included labor leaders, company presidents, lawyers, university professors, the chairman of a farmers union federation, a university president, a dentist, a writer, and a banker.

18 of the 22 were former Diet members seeking reelection.

PIONEER EVANGELISM

One important method of evangelism in Japan--a system that has been in operation now for a number of years--is the "pioneer Evangelism Program" of the United Church of Christ. This involves sending a pastor to a selected community, supporting him during the first years of his work, providing a place of meeting, and building a self-supporting church within as short a time as possible.

Under one plan the full salary of the pastor is paid for the first year. This amounts to about \$418. In each succeeding year this amount is cut by 20%, so that by the end of the fifth year the new church should be ready to pay its own way. In addition, the Church Building Commission is asked to provide \$1,394 for a meeting place.

Another plan is designed for communities which present a more difficult challenge to evangelism. Under this arrangement, \$558 is made available for the first year's work, and this subsidy is reduced each year over an interval of seven years. During the entire seven year period, an established church, the "parent congregation", is asked to help the new church to the extent of \$140 a year. Other help is provided to secure a manse and church building for the Japanese pastor-evangelist.

Some communities are more open to the Gospel and present a situation where a self-supporting congregation may develop over a relatively short length of time. This may be true, for example, in a new housing area, or in the rapidly growing suburb of a large city. In such a situation the pastor's salary and house rent up to \$1,115 a year may be provided at first, with the hope that aid may be discontinued at the end of a three-year period.

Neither this plan, nor any other worthy plan, has produced spectacular evangelistic gains. Yet progress has been made. According to a recent Cooperative Evangelism Committee Report, 5 out of 12 churches begun in 1953 are now fully self-supporting. This work has been going on across the country from Hokkaido to Kyushu in 10 different synods of the Church. 9 of the 12 pioneer congregations now have their own buildings. Membership in the 12 pioneer churches now averages 27 believers, with a total of 327.

Although the personnel is Japanese, funds for the Pioneer Evangelism Program come largely from the Interboard Committee-related missions in the United States and Canada. The money is administered by the Council of Cooperation and by committees of the United Church of Christ.

THAI LEADER STUDIES AT AVACO

Mr. Piam Indrachotikul, Christian teacher from Thailand, has just returned to his country following five weeks of training at AVACO (Audio Visual Commission of the National Christian Council) in the production of filmstrips and related subjects. This training was carried out following the completion of a year of study at International Christian University. It is hoped that Mr. Indrachotikul will be the first of a number of Asian students to take part in a study program carried on jointly by AVACO and ICU.

MANILA & OKINAWA TO AIR JAPANESE BROADCASTS

Beginning next month AVACO will contribute six of its radio programs for broadcast over outlets of the Far East Broadcasting Company in Manila and Okinawa. These programs dubbed and sent on tape from Tokyo will be broadcast from Manila back to Japan by shortwave. In addition, they will be broadcast over the new medium wave transmitter of the FEBC in Okinawa. The programs being sent are ones which have been aired previously in Japan over various stations. All are in Japanese. Included are the following: "The Music of Bach", "Looking Back from Bach" (pre-Bach Christian music with interpretation), "Songs of the Heart", "Uncle Sekiya", "Story-teller", and "The Hanako Murakami Hour".

AVACO PROGRAMS REACH LARGE AUDIENCES

In addition to Radio Tokyo and Radio Kobe, "Songs of the Heart", featuring the AVACO Chorus, is now being aired twice weekly over the Shizuoka Broadcasting Company.

Also interesting to note is that "Housewife Talk" (new title for "The Murakami Hanako Hour"), now on six stations, is almost always broadcast on premium mid-morning or mid-afternoon time, when the largest number of housewives can be reached. This is in spite of the fact that it is non-sponsored, sustaining-time broadcast.

HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH LEADERS MEET

How can we more effectively lead high school young people into the Christian life?

This was the question confronting 35 leaders of senior high youth groups who took part in a conference sponsored by the National Christian Council Youth Commission at Naka-Karuizawa on May 6-8. The United Church of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Baptist Churches, YMCA, YWCA, Christian schools, and National Christian Council staff were represented at the Karuizawa gathering.

"Leadership in the Bible" was the subject of a presentation by the Reverend Gerald B. Harvey, Asia area secretary of the Methodist Church, U. S. A. The Reverend Fumio Koike of Kwansei Gakuin High School spoke on "Leading High School Students in the School". The Reverend Yoshiyasu Kami of the United Church's Youth Commission discussed the theme, "Leading Students in the Church".

The Conference urged that there be a continuing study commission concerned with the leadership of high school youth. The need was expressed for a handbook for youth group leaders.

The Reverend Mr. Mizuno, of the National Christian Council staff, was in charge of arrangements for the conference.

EVENING SPEAKERS AT WORLD CONVENTION

It has recently been confirmed that Bishop Otto Dibelius of Germany will participate in the World Convention on Christian Education in Tokyo, August 6-13. Bishop Dibelius is scheduled to speak at the popular meeting on the evening of August 7. His theme will be "Totalitarian Youth Training--A Challenge to the Church".

The program for the other evening meetings during the week of the Convention has been announced as follows:

August 8-- Bishop Shot K. Mondal of India will speak on "The Sunday School and the Church".

August 9-- Professor G. Baez Camargo of Mexico will discuss "A Theology for Christian Education".

August 11-- Professor Christian Baeta of Ghana will develop the theme, "Christian Education in the Midst of a World Revolution".

August 12-- The Reverend John Havea of the Tonga Islands will speak on "The Christian in His Community".

August 13-- Dr. Gerald E. Knoff of the United States has the topic, "Evangelism Through Christian Education".

